

PRIVATE ASSOCIATIONS OR PUBLIC BODIES? THE GEROUSIAI OF THE GREEK CITIES IN THE IMPERIAL PERIOD*

By Nikos Giannakopoulos

Summary: The article explores the position of the Gerousia in the associative universe of the Greek cities of the Imperial period. The first section examines the public dimension of the Gerousia, as it emerges from its interaction with the civic institutions, the local notables and the imperial power. The second section focuses on the Gerousia's similarities with private associations, both in their organizational form and in several of their activities, such as the protection of graves and the administration of funerary endowments. The third section draws a comparison between the public role of the Gerousia and that of private associations. Finally, the last section proposes a taxonomy of the various corporate bodies of the Greek polis in relation to their access to events, acts and symbols that expressed the sovereign power of the civic community and its collective identity. In these terms, the Gerousia occupied an impressively high position which brought her very close to the Council and the People.

Introduction

During the Imperial Period organised bodies of elders styled *Gerousiai* or simply – and more rarely – *gerontes* and *geraioi* are attested in numerous Greek cities, especially in Asia Minor but also in the Aegean islands and in certain important centres of mainland Greece including Athens and Thessaloniki.¹ These Gerousiai first appear in the Late Hellenistic Period

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1 Five monographs have been devoted to this institution: Oliver 1941; Van Rossum 1988; Bailey 2006; Giannakopoulos 2008a; Bauer 2014.

but from the mid-1st century B.C. onwards they multiply and flourish in a spectacular fashion. Unlike the homonymous bodies of the Archaic and Classical periods – for example, the Spartan Gerousia – they did not perform functions directly relating to civic government and did not acquire or exercise any kind of administrative competence over public affairs. They were not involved in law-making, the administration of justice or in proposing decrees to the popular assembly. Their most characteristic feature, one on which all modern scholars agree, was the fact that they were centred on the gymnasium. Indeed, about two dozen cities provide us with epigraphic evidence of *gymnasiarchoi* in charge of these Gerousiai and of gymnasial amenities used by them.²

In the late 19th century certain students of the civic institutions in Roman Asia Minor, especially those focusing on Ephesus, where a Gerousia perhaps involved in civic administration already appears under Lysimachos,³ treated the Gerousiai of the Imperial Period as public bodies

- 2 The origin of these gymnasial Gerousiai is not clear and the subject cannot be treated here. In a few cities late Hellenistic associations of *presbyteroi* predate the Gerousia, which emerges later in the Imperial Period. But sometimes the two terms are used in the same document, referring to what seems to have been a single body of elders. According to Van Rossum (1988: 238-39) the Gerousia in these cities may be seen as the continuation of the *presbyteroi*. Zimmermann (2007: 1523-27) argued that at least in some cities the Gerousia may have emerged as the representative council of a broader body of *presbyteroi*. I have elsewhere argued (Giannakopoulos 2008a: 13-27) in favour of an institutional evolution from associations of *presbyteroi* to Gerousiai that were more fully integrated in the public sphere (the term *presbyteroi* remaining in use when referring to the purely gymnasial activities of the members). Focusing on the *presbyteroi* themselves and not on their relation with the Gerousia, Fröhlich (2013: 49) rightly re-emphasised that local variations constituted the decisive factor (a point already noted by Van Rossum, Zimmermann and Giannakopoulos). Whatever the relation between the *presbyteroi* and the Gerousia might have been, it should be stressed that in most cities a gymnasial association of elders appears only – and right from the start – with the name Gerousia or *gerontes/geraioi*.
- 3 The evidence for the Gerousia of Ephesus under Lysimachos consists in a passage of Strabo (14.1.21), who remarks that this body was attached to the *epikletoi* and two honorific decrees (*I. Eph.* 1449, 1470). These testimonies have generated various interpretations regarding the Gerousia's involvement in the local government (see more recently Bailey 2006: 45-58; Bauer 2014: 81-90).

analogous to the Council and exercising some kind of authority and control over religious affairs.⁴ However, in the first part of the 20th century it was Mommsen's view that prevailed: Gerousiai were characterised as primarily social organisations composed of respectable citizens of mature age.⁵ For example, Jones, in his seminal book on the Greek city from Alexander to Justinian, treated the Gerousiai as the equivalent of the groups of *neoi*: indicatively, he wrote about a society for men of a mature age, characterising it as an aristocratic club.⁶ A fairly similar approach was adopted by D. Magie, who also linked the Gerousiai with the groups of *neoi* and the gymnasium, writing about associations and organisations of social character resembling modern clubs.⁷

In an extremely important study published in 1941 James Oliver redefined the problem in many important ways by distinguishing between:

- a) social organisations of elder citizens, private or semi-private in character, corresponding to the organisations of *epheboi* and *neoi*.
- b) public bodies or corporations involved in sacred affairs, what he called the 'sacred Gerousiai', mainly on the basis of evidence from Athens and Ephesus.⁸

Oliver's views were criticised and never widely accepted.⁹ It was only in 1988 that a comprehensive and systematic study of the Greek Gerousia in the Roman Period was compiled by Van Rossum.¹⁰ The value of this book cannot be overstated and has been widely recognised. Van Rossum

4 See e.g. Menadier 1880: 52-63; Hicks 1890: 82; Hogarth 1891: 70-74. The most recent extensive summary of the various views expressed on the nature of the Gerousiai is provided by Bailey 2006: 4-15; Bauer 2014: 66-77. Cf. also Oliver 1941: 9-13; Van Rossum 1988: 1-16; Giannakopoulos 2008a: 7-12.

5 Mommsen 1894: 326 n. 2.

6 Jones 1940: 225-26.

7 Magie 1950: 62-63.

8 Without any reservations Oliver (1941: 3, 8) characterises both the Athenian and the Ephesian Gerousiai as public bodies or corporations, as opposed to the (semi)private 'Asiatic' or 'Ionian' Gerousiai centred on the gymnasium.

9 See the review compiled by Jones 1944.

10 Van Rossum 1988.

studied in detail the prosopographical data and concluded that the Gerousia was composed both of councillors and rich commoners, frequently related to the former. He rightly rejected Oliver's distinction, claiming that any Gerousia could under certain circumstances be called *hiera* and be involved in religious ceremonies, as a passive agent, invited by rich benefactors.¹¹ For Van Rossum the Gerousia was 'an institution through which the members are established as a privileged group'.¹² At a formal level, its political role was not significant and was expressed through the means of honorific decrees. Informally, the Gerousia provided a forum for discussion for respectable influential men living in cities where 'patronage and personal relationships were of vital political importance'.¹³

Hence, there has already been a considerable scholarly discussion about the character and nature of the Gerousia and the main objective has been to define whether the Gerousia was a social or a public corporation, or in Oliver's case, to what extent we may distinguish between public Gerousiai with religious functions and social ones. Attention should be paid to the choice of terms: the discussion has evolved mainly around the dipole social-public and not private-public. However, as noted above, Oliver did define his social Gerousiai as private or semi-private; moreover, the fact that 20th-century Anglo-American scholars frequently compared the Gerousia with modern clubs suggests in my view that they tended at least implicitly to treat it as a private organisation. The use of the term 'social' on their part was rather dictated by the fact that they quite rightly focused on the Gerousia's relation with the gymnasium and on its similarity to the age-groups established and functioning within and around this institution. In reality, though, the characterisation of the Gerousia as a social organisation rested on a notion similar to the one underlying the juxtaposition between private bodies and public ones: the assumption that private – and, as a matter of fact, social – bodies do not, by definition, perform any function relating to the administration of state affairs.

This is of course true but in my view does not suffice to place the Gerousia exclusively in the realm of private-social institutions. Above all, the

11 Van Rossum 1988: 87-145, 170-73.

12 Van Rossum 1988: 241.

13 Van Rossum 1988: 242.

Gerousia's involvement in the award of civic honours, a phenomenon entering the realm of civic politics and deeply rooted in the public sphere, and its presence in various acts symbolising the civic community's political identity call for another perspective. Thus, in a dissertation compiled in 2004 and published in 2008 I tried to highlight what may be termed as the public, even political, dimension of the Gerousia, a subject left relatively unexplored in Van Rossum's study, which is nevertheless valuable and very illuminating on a wide range of issues.¹⁴ Likewise, in a still unpublished dissertation submitted in 2006 and compiled independently from mine, Colin Bailey also emphasised the semi-public character of the Ephesian Gerousia. Quite recently Ennio Bauer drew our attention to the local variations that characterised the Gerousiai of the Asia Minor cities. Finally, Eckhardt has examined the Gerousia in the light of his general thesis about an officialization and institutionalization of associations, based on the Roman model. In this line of thought, the Gerousia (and the associations of *neoi* as well), whose establishment and privileges are frequently recognized by the Roman state, enters the scope of Roman law more fully than other associations and tends to resemble the Roman *collegia licita*.¹⁵

My intention in this paper is to present and discuss the Gerousia's public dimension, mainly by focusing on evidence relating to its publicly visible activities and to certain of its organisational aspects. Within this framework I attempt a brief comparison with similar activities deployed by religious and professional associations which we conveniently, but perhaps not always completely accurately, characterise as private. In order to better illustrate the differences between the Gerousia and the other associations commonly characterised as private, I also take into account the similarities between the Gerousia and another gymnasial association with a considerable public dimension, the *neoi*. However, as limitations of space do not permit a fuller treatment of these similarities here, the reader should refer to B. Eckhardt's works cited in note 15.

A terminological clarification is necessary: first of all, the public sphere is not to be equated with the government and the state. Moreo-

14 Giannakopoulos 2008a.

15 Bailey 2006: 18; Bauer 2014; Eckhardt 2016; Eckhardt 2021; Eckhardt 2023: 340-41.

ver, even what we call private associations, as they interacted with various social and political agents – by awarding honours, entering into patronage relations with high-standing individuals, cultivating bonds with sanctuaries and official cults, engaging in economic activities and adopting the organisation model of the *polis* –, may be seen as creating and obtaining access to what has been recently termed as a ‘rather novel form of public space’, perhaps similar in some respects to the modern notion of Civil Society.¹⁶ Being very much akin to private associations, in terms of internal organisation and activities (see below Section II), the *Gerousiai* also participated in this process. However, several of the *Gerousia*’s features and the nature of its interaction with the state authorities (summarised in Section III points a-i) demonstrate a considerable degree of access to what may be termed a ‘traditional’ public space which, although not completely identified with governmental institutions, was nonetheless directly related to and controlled by the state and its agents (for example, the various civic organs and officials). It is in this sense that the ‘public’ dimension of the *Gerousia* is examined in this paper. Although this distinction is rather artificial, it may be useful and fruitful in comparing the position held by the *Gerousia* with that of the various private associations.

I. The public role and public dimension of the *Gerousia*

To a large extent, Van Rossum’s conclusions were based on an implicit underestimation of the significance attributed to the awards of civic honours. However, the latter cannot be treated as a mere formality; they constituted important political acts which articulated a political discourse on the part of the honouring party, regarding both the honoured person and the values that he or she promoted through his or her public presence. The award of honours was a matter of thorough debate and discussion, mainly because of a keen awareness that honours functioned as means of enhancing the political capital of each individual benefactor,

16 For this line of thought see Gabrielsen & Thomsen 2015: 12-16.

within the wider framework of an intense intra-elite competition. Benefactors needed the visible honours that the *polis* and various institutions within it could offer and this in turn gave to all the potential honouring groups a considerable political power and a significant degree of control over the public behaviour of the local political class.¹⁷ In other words, the attribution of honours was the necessary condition which enabled the system of euergetism to continue to function as an important element for the promotion of civic life, in accordance with long-established prevailing norms and cultural expectations regarding the nature of civilised life within the *polis*.¹⁸

In this respect, the Gerousia's frequent co-operation with the local Council and People in the award of honours, as evidenced by dozens of honorific inscriptions mentioning these three institutions as co-grantors of honour,¹⁹ demonstrates how well-rooted the Gerousia was in local civic life. The language of these honorific inscriptions, in terms of what it indicates about the procedures resulting in the award of honours, is revealing. Frequently found in honorific inscriptions, formulas such as ἡ βουλὴ καὶ ὁ δῆμος καὶ ἡ γερουσία ἐτείμησαν may in fact indicate that the Gerousia first issued a separate decree temporally coordinating its actions with the Council and the People and subsequently cooperated with the latter in the erection of a joint monument. The exact form of the procedures behind this cooperation between the different institutions is not

17 Van Nijf 1997: 113-20 rightly stresses this point. On the political significance of honours in Roman society see Lendon 1997: 31-57, who rightly insists on the fact that a notable's *time* depended on the public recognition of his deeds and merits, a function performed by the honours attributed by the community. On honours as a means of establishing a social distance between the *euergetai* and the rest of the citizens see Sartre 1991: 164-65. For a recent comprehensive treatment of these issues see Heller-Van Nijf 2017: 5-15.

18 For the diverse ways in which the Greek *polis* of the Imperial Period defined itself by reference to the cultural values of Hellenism, embodied in various aspects of civic life partly financed by euergetism, see the recent synthetic treatments by Zuiderhoek 2009: 71-112; Pont 2010. Cf. also the insightful remarks of Mitchell 1993: 80-81, 198-99. On the various considerations taken into account in euergetic choices between games and buildings see now Kokkinia 2012; NG 2015.

19 The evidence is assembled and discussed in Giannakopoulos 2008a: 185-247.

easily discernible, but at least two inscriptions of the late Hellenistic Period may provide a clue.

The first one is a decree issued by the Council and the People of Minoa at Amorgos in honour of the *gymnasiarchos* Eunomides.²⁰ Only the last part of the justification clause is preserved; it refers to the fact that Eunomides had also been honoured by a *koinon ton aliephomenon* and that the People did not want to lag behind. The Council and the People decided to award a crown, an event that was to be proclaimed at certain festivals: the proclamation recorded the People as the sole grantor of the honour. However, the decree also prescribed the erection of an image in the gymnasium with an inscription which referred to both the People and the *koinon ton aleiphomenon* as the honouring bodies.

The second inscription is the well-known decree of Sestos for Menas.²¹ In l. 41 there is a reference to the fact that the *epheboi* and the *neoi* had crowned Menas when he served as *gymnasiarchos* for the first time. Lines 54 ff. refer to Menas' deeds during his second term of office as *gymnasiarchos*. The Council and the People recognised and approved of the crown given to him by the *epheboi* and the *neoi* (l. 95) and decided to erect a bronze image of him in the gymnasium with an inscription mentioning both the People and the *neoi* as the honouring bodies.

Two points need to be stressed here. First, it is hardly accidental that the honouring bodies which cooperated with the Council and the People in the aforementioned decrees were, just like the *Gerousia*, centred on the gymnasium. The case of the *neoi* deserves special attention: as has already been noted, this officially recognised gymnasial association bore numerous similarities to the *Gerousia* in terms of integration into the public sphere (more on this below). Second, in both cases the Council and the People first took into consideration and then accepted the honours voted separately by other associations and then proceeded with the erection of an honorific monument with an inscription mentioning all the parties involved as grantors of the honour. Different institutions inside the *polis* responded to and honoured a great benefactor at the same time, initially functioning in a formally independent manner but subsequently

20 IG XII 7 235.

21 I. Sestos 1.

working together at the final stage of the honorific process. The Gerousia's frequent appearance alongside the Council and the People in honorific inscriptions was probably the result of formal procedures similar to those described in the decrees for Eunomides and Menas. These procedures brought the Gerousia into official contact and interaction with the Council and the People and ended with the association of the names of all three parties in public monuments, i.e. in the civic landscape.

Other verbal formulas in honorific inscriptions demonstrate the participation of the Gerousia in a common decree issued jointly by all the honouring parties. Such seems to be the case in Akmonia, as the honorific inscription for L. Egnatius Quartus demonstrates. The Council, the People, the Gerousia and a civic tribe awarded honours *κατὰ ψήφισμα πάνδημον*.²² At Patara the honorific decree for the Lykiarch Iason explicitly mentions the Gerousia as one of the issuing bodies (*ἔδοξε Παταρέων τῆς μητροπόλεως τοῦ Λυκίων ἔθνους τῆ βουλῆ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τῆ γερουσίᾳ*).²³ Once again, it is not easy to understand what exactly the Gerousia's role was in a procedure usually and normally involving the popular assembly examining a *probouleuma* issued by the Council. Nonetheless, this participation in a joint decree marks an even fuller institutional integration and interaction than the one indicated by the honorific formula *ἡ βουλή καὶ ὁ δῆμος καὶ ἡ γερουσία ἐτείμησαν ...* The crucial point here is that, whether as a co-operator in the award of honours or as a participant in a common decision-making process, in the language of these inscriptions the Gerousia appears to stand in the same capacity as the Council and the People. It may occupy the third position in the formula but it is placed at the same level as them.

Clearly, the Gerousia's praise was in many cases considered as a necessary element for the full expression of the civic community's gratitude towards its benefactors. The obvious question is why the civic bodies entrusted with local government were willing to accept the Gerousia as a formal institutional partner in their honorific practices. In my view, the Council and the People tended to exploit in this way the political potential created by the existence of organised bodies composed exclusively of mature men. What this political potential actually meant can be seen

22 IGR IV 642.

23 IGR III 704 II B.

in contemporary discussions about the political role of the elders, of which Plutarch's 'Should an Old Man be engaged in Politics?' is a characteristic example. Plutarch emphasised that the elders should not hold administrative posts²⁴ but rather devote themselves to the role of educators.²⁵ The truly politically active elder advises those who have power, instructs those who need instruction, helps those who take decisions, corrects those who behave wrongly and supports and encourages those who act rightly.²⁶ What is of interest here is that the answers that Plutarch put forward do not essentially differ from the way in which the Greek cities of Asia Minor treated the Gerousia. If the attribution of honours was a necessary condition for the continuance of euergetism, the inclusion of the Gerousia amongst the civic agents conferring honour enhanced the honorific arsenal of the civic community and served the purpose of further encouraging public acts of euergetism, which were seen as contributing to the normal function of the local political and social system.

To a large extent this inclusion may be explained by reference to two factors. The first is what may be described as the respectability of old age. The notion that old age was inherently associated with good counsel and practical wisdom, and, consequently, that old men were still able to provide services to the community, was neither originally nor exclusively Plutarchean: it constituted a *topos* in the Greek and Roman literary tradition and a well-established conviction regarding the status and public role attributed to the older members of the community. Admittedly, the negative treatment of old age, with emphasis laid on old men's physical and mental disadvantages, was equally widespread.²⁷ Hence, one may plausibly argue, as Parkin does, that in reality 'old age did not grant

24 Plut. *Mor.* 793c-794b.

25 Plut. *Mor.* 790e.

26 Plut. *Mor.* 796e-f.

27 Both approaches to old age are systematically treated by Parkin 2003: 57-89 (analysis of the relevant literary tradition), 100-10.

automatically authority or superiority'.²⁸ In this respect we cannot automatically assume that the Gerousia of the Imperial Period was an institution embodying the respectability of old age.²⁹

Although this is true, it is not, however, the whole truth. When we are faced with corporate bodies whose identity was at least allegedly based on the old age of their members,³⁰ we come upon a predetermined positive answer to the problem of whether old age deserved or was entitled to claim public respect. The very choice of the name 'Gerousia' inevitably evoked associations with historical entities such as the Spartan Gerousia or the Roman Senate that was so highly regarded in the Greek East, bodies perceived to be characterised by the qualities of *consilium*, *ratio* and *sententia*.³¹ In this respect, it is by no means accidental that in their correspondence with the Ephesian Gerousia, one of the notions that the Roman emperors and proconsuls used so as to justify the privileges awarded to this body was its *πρεσβεῖον*.³² In fact, there is no reason to question the fact that in the ideological climate of the Imperial Period this notion was a defining element of the Gerousia's identity.³³

The second factor that accounts for this inclusion is related to the fundamental fact that the Gerousia was centred on the gymnasium. In the Imperial Period the possession of Greek *paideia* was considered as an indispensable element of individual and collective self-definition³⁴ in civic communities which prioritised the promotion of Hellenic culture and its various material manifestations (festivals, buildings), placing them at the

28 Parkin 2003: 111; cf. 128.

29 Bauer 2014: 72 criticising Giannakopoulos 2008a: 251-59, 496-99.

30 There is no specific information regarding the age limit for entering the Gerousia. Such a limit surely existed (*I. Sultan Daği* 29 refers to a man who, after reaching the appropriate age, was admitted to the *synedrion geronton*), but the age limit does not seem to have been very high. A funerary inscription from Nikaia records a *Gerouastes* who died at the age of 45 (*I. Iznik* 275).

31 See Cicero, *De Senectute* 18-19 and Plut. *Mor.* 789d-e. Cf. Byl 1977: 108 n. 8 (on a probable influence of Cicero on Plutarch); Talbert 1984: 80-98 (on contemporary attitudes towards the Senate and the high esteem enjoyed by this body in the Greek East); Parkin 2003: 103.

32 *SEG* XLIII (1993) 765, 767.

33 Giannakopoulos 2008a: 497-502; Spawforth 2012: 172-74.

34 Cf. Kleijwegt 1991: 83-88.

epicentre of their construction of civic identity.³⁵ In this respect, the *gerontes*' attachment to the gymnasium was a public statement about their continuing devotion to a particularly Greek way of life through their participation in the activities of an institution which constituted the very core of Hellenic cultural values and identity.³⁶ Within this framework the Gerousia could be seen as an organised body which championed these values by investing them with the authority stemming from the prestige of old age. The combination could surely have worked the other way round as well, the Gerousia itself deriving a high status and authority from its commitment to the gymnasium, as it was also the case with associations of *neoi*.

Since the institutional framework, legitimised by tradition, of the Greek city still revolved around a tripartite political structure which comprised the magistrates, the Council and the Assembly of the People,³⁷ there was obviously thought to be no space for the Gerousia to acquire and perform purely administrative functions. On the other hand, another way to make use of the Gerousia was to assign to it a special position in the politics of civic honours. The public praise awarded by the Gerousia to civic benefactors was nothing more than a material manifestation of the *gerontes*' duty to act as the educators of the community: ἀλλ' εἰ διὰ μηδὲν ἄλλο τῷ γέροντι παιδείας ἔνεκα τῶν νέων καὶ διδασκαλίας πολιτευτέον ἐστίν, as Plutarch eloquently stated.³⁸ Praise of euergetism

35 See the works cited above in n. 18.

36 Cf. Van Nijf 2001: 321-29 who points out that gymnasial activity constituted an essential element of the way in which local elites conceptualised civic identity in the Imperial Period and relates this development to the growing popularity of athletic games. See also Zuiderhoek 2009: 89-91. On physical exercise as an indispensable aspect of the way of life of those *gerontes* who did not resign from civic politics see Plut. *Mor.* 793 B. Cf. Galen, *Υγιεινῶν Λόγοι*, 5. Parkin 2003: 253 n. 62 assembles other relevant literary testimonies. A decree passed by the Gerousia of Magnesia on the Meander stated that ἡ δὲ τοῦ ἐλαίου χρήσις ἐστὶν κατάλληλος μάλιστα καὶ ἀνανγκαιοτάτη τοῖς σώμασιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ πλέον τοῖς τῶν γερόντων (*I. Magnesia* 116 ll. 9-10).

37 Cf. Van Nijf-Alston 2011: 9-11. On the interaction among Council, Assembly and officials in the cities of Roman Asia Minor see Fernoux 2011: 189-236, 348-88; a detailed discussion of civic officials may be found in Dmitriev 2005: 109-246.

38 Plut. *Mor.* 790e.

was perfectly compatible with the Plutarchean notion of the *gerontes* being responsible not for providing leadership but for ensuring that the community possessed the proper leadership. Hence, the very existence of organised bodies embodying the respectability of old age and the cultural values of the gymnasium, combined with the particular significance of the politics of honour in the Greek cities of the Imperial Period, gave to the Gerousia an important public, even political – in the wide sense of the word – dimension. The Gerousia appeared as an important additional provider of honour, which was highly esteemed both by the traditional honouring parties, the Council and the People, and the honourees themselves. Furthermore, the very fact of the Gerousia's frequent cooperation with the Council and the People, gave to the associations of old men a considerable advantage in their competition with other associations equally not involved in the local government and administration.³⁹

The Gerousia's close association with the world of civic institutions is also manifest in the benefactions directed to this body so as to support its infrastructure and activities. Two examples are particularly indicative. As is well known, under Hadrian Smyrna underwent an extensive programme of urban embellishment and renovation, partly financed by the emperor himself and partly by local magnates. The stele recording the relevant promises includes a reference to the *prytanes* Klaudianos' commitment to repair the roof of the Gerousia's *aleipterion*. Other such interventions included the reconstruction of public gardens, works in two *basilikai* and the construction of a temple of Tyche.⁴⁰ At Thyateira a local benefactor who supervised the construction of an aqueduct and the erection of statues of Eros was also involved in building an *oikobasilikos* for the Gerousia.⁴¹ In both cases general schemes of more or less public character aiming at associating the benefactors' excellence with a variety of civic institutions accorded to the Gerousia a prominent position.

Moreover, as a recipient of distributions, the Gerousia always appears along with the Council, the civic tribes or the citizen-body as a whole.

39 On the competition between different associations as grantors of honour see Van Nijf 1997: 120.

40 *I. Smyrna* 697 (see ll.16-18 for the Gerousia).

41 *TAM V* 2 991.

Admittedly, these distributions were private initiatives, although they were nonetheless addressed to civic categories and corporate bodies. Thus, local magnates like Menodora from Sillyon or the anonymous Lycian benefactor whose services are recorded in an inscription from Xanthos included the Gerousia among the beneficiaries of their generosity.⁴² At Aphrodisias, a dining-room was dedicated to Aphrodite and the *patris*, and the donor promised to finance on a regular basis banquets offered to the councillors, the *diakosiaprotoi*, the Gerousia and the civic tribes.⁴³ In Philadelphiea and Aphrodisias the Gerousia appears next to the Council as a recipient of commemorative donations prescribing annually repeated distributions of money, sometimes held before the statue of the donor.⁴⁴ The benefactor Gaius Stertinius Orpex, a freedman serving as *scriba librarius* in Ephesus, deserves special mention. He bequeathed money to the Council and the Gerousia for annual distributions. The councillors were gathered for that purpose in front of his honorific monument erected in the market-place and the *Gerousiastai* in front of his honorific monument erected in the stadium. The Gerousia was also the recipient of another distribution in front of the donor's grave, where a banquet also took place.⁴⁵ Orpex's public presence included the Gerousia in a particular way, corresponding to the body's distinct functions relating to its involvement in athletic activities and the perpetuation of the memory of important benefactors.

Another point that should be taken into account is the fact that, when appearing as a participant in banquets or as a beneficiary of distributions of sacrificial meat, the Gerousia attended events that were organised by local sacral magistrates in their official capacity. Thus, a priestly couple at Stratonikeia (Theophilos and Tryphaina) proudly recorded in an inscription summarising their deeds during their term of office that they offered the sacred banquet-hall for the use of all the social and age categories of the *polis* and that they organised a banquet for the Gerousia, the only local institution to be treated in this way.⁴⁶ Several priestesses of

42 See IGR III 800-2 and *Fouilles de Xanthos* VII 67 respectively.

43 *IAph2007* 12.26 d (MAMA VIII 413d).

44 See *IAph2007* 11 23, 12 317, 12 1111 from Aphrodisias and *CIG* 3417 from Philadelphia.

45 The inscriptions for Orpex are *I. Eph.* 411, 720, 2113, 4123.

46 *I. Stratonikeia* 270.

Artemis at Ephesos distributed sacrificial meat to the Council and the Gerousia, as part of their official duties.⁴⁷ Following the same example, two Milesian *gymnasiarchoi*, after performing the regularly prescribed sacrifices to Herakles, Hermes and the local hero Antiochos, distributed the sacrificial meat to the Gerousia.⁴⁸ At Stratonikeia another couple of priests (Oulpios Ariston and Ailia Tryphena Drakontis) completed their term of office by distributing equal sums of money to the Council and the Gerousia,⁴⁹ while at Seleukeia in Cilicia, the buyer of the local priesthood of Athena was obliged to offer cash handouts to the councillors, the citizens and the *gerontes*, the latter being more generously treated than the former.⁵⁰

Furthermore, special mention should be made to a similar well-established practice in Syros. From the middle of the 2nd century A.D. the eponymous *archontes*, the *stephanephoroi*, organised various ceremonies during the first days of their duties, including sacrifices, distributions of money and wine and of course banquets.⁵¹ The beneficiaries were roughly the whole free male population of the island divided into the following categories: the Gerousia, the citizens, the *katoikoi*, and the foreigners from the neighbouring islands. Sometimes the women and the children also took part. The Gerousia was the only corporate body that participated (note the absence of the Council) and it occupied the most privileged position as far as the amount of distributed money was concerned. Moreover, it was recorded that the privileges of the Gerousia derived from a long-established custom, while those of the other categories resulted from a decree issued by the Council and the People.⁵² Among these ceremonies there were banquets offered by the *stephanephoroi* to the Gerousia and to whomever else they wanted to invite⁵³ and this implies that the position of the Gerousia was independent from the will of

47 *I. Eph.* 987-88; *SEG* XLIII (1993) 779.

48 *I. Milet* 368.

49 *I. Stratonikeia* 237 ll. 9-15.

50 Hagel & Tomaschitz 1998: 371 Seleukia 124.

51 *IG* XII 5 659-66. See Van Rossum 1988: 157-58; Nigdelis 1990: 282; Schmitt-Pantel 1992: 268-69; Giannakopoulos 2008a: 376-385; Le Queré 2015: 217

52 *IG* XII 5 662 ll. 12-18.

53 *IG* XII 5 663 ll. 20-21 and *IG* XII 5 667 ll. 14-18

the current *stephanephoros*, who had to comply with the precedent established by the custom. When a ritualised representation of the civic hierarchy took place, the Gerousia was positioned at the top. Unsurprisingly, according to a sacred law of Magnesia on the Meander regulating an annual procession, the members of the Gerousia occupied the second position right after the *stephanephoros* and the priests of Artemis.⁵⁴

What defined the Gerousia's role in these events was not the fact that it acted as a passive agent⁵⁵ – every invited group may be considered as passive in such a context, in the sense that it did not organise the event – but the fact that it was chosen by the organisers precisely because as a highly esteemed body it was considered suitable to participate in public ceremonies which dramatised the civic institutional landscape.⁵⁶ In this respect, the Gerousia appeared as an essential element of civic identity.

It is in this light that we may interpret the presence of images personifying the Gerousia in the iconography of civic coins issued by cities such as Hierapolis, Aphrodisias, Tiberiopolis (where the Gerousia is depicted along with the Council), Antiocheia on the Maeander and Aizanoi.⁵⁷ Similarly, in Akmonia the statue of the Gerousia stood next to those of the People and the *Polis*, as an honorific inscription dated to 68 A.D. informs us.⁵⁸ The absence of the Council is again worth noting in this case, the Gerousia being considered as a corporate body perfectly suitable to stand in the former's place as an institutional embodiment of the local civic community. It is hardly accidental that prominent citizens of Kos and Attaleia bearing the honorific titles of *hyios poleos* and *hyios boules kai demou* respectively were awarded the title of *hyios Gerousias* as well. The resulting mixed titles (*hyios poleos kai Gerousias* at Kos and *hyios boules*,

54 *I. Magnesia* 98 dated to 197/6 B.C.

55 As Van Rossum 1988: 156-77 argues in his thorough analysis of the banquets offered to and attended by the Gerousia.

56 On the function of banquets and distributions as events reflecting and at the same time shaping the civic reality and hierarchy see Schmitt-Pantel 1992: 10-11, 417-20; Van Nijf 1997: 150-57.

57 Hierapolis: BMC Phrygia 240-41 nr. 78-81; see also *RPC* IV 9789-90 (temporary). Aphrodisias: *RPC* IV 2200-1 (temporary). Cf. Leschorn-Franke 2002: 79. Tiberiopolis: *RPC* III 2521. Antiocheia on the Maeander: BMC Caria 17 nr. 18 and 18 nr. 25. Aizanoi: BMC Phrygia 39 nr. 112. Cf. Leschorn-Franke 2002: 79 and Giannakopoulos 2008a: 259-63.

58 *SEG* XLVI (2006), 1490.

demou kai Gerousias at Attaleia) expressed the institutional weight of a corporate body which was considered important enough to stand next to the traditional civic organs or even next to the inclusive notion of the *polis* as a distinct element of the civic community in a fictive filial relation that underlined the moral duty of the honorands towards their fatherland.⁵⁹

That the citizens and the authorities of a Greek city under Roman rule perceived their local *Gerousiai* as essentially public institutions becomes equally evident when we examine the language of some of the inscriptions pertaining to benefactions and financial subsidies addressed to this body. In the 3rd century A.D., a lady from Thessaloniki who wished to console herself for the premature death of her son, a local councillor, donated to the city – for the benefit of the *Gerousia* – the sum of 10,000 drachmas (Αὐρηλία) · Ἰσιδώρα| ἡ μήτηρ εἰς παραμυθίαν ἑαυτῆς, ἐπιδοῦσα τῇ πόλει ἐπ’ ὀνόματος| αὐτοῦ εἰς γερουσίαν Ἀττικὰς| μυρίας).⁶⁰ Taken literally, this shows that the civic authorities were the first to receive the donation, which was to be subsequently handed over by them to the local *Gerousia*. The reason why the donor chose not to address her donation directly to the *Gerousia* eludes us.⁶¹ But it is equally important that in the donor’s mind a gift addressed to the city could be ultimately directed to the *Gerousia* precisely because the latter was conceived as being an institution fully integrated in the local civic landscape.

A similar notion underlies the construction of a *stoa* and a bathing-room for the *Gerousia* of Teos under Augustus.⁶² This was a project financed by the interest produced out of the money that a local benefactor had left to the city. The fragmentary honorary inscription which provides the relevant information enables us to grasp some of the details of

59 For Attaleia see *IGR* III 780; *An. Ep.* 1974: 635. For the evidence from Kos see Buraselis 2000: 160–62. Cf. Giannakopoulos 2008a: 273–91; *ibid.* 2008b.

60 *IG* X 2 1 207.

61 A somewhat similar parallel may be found in the donation of 5,000 denarii by Caius Caninius Synlasson to the city of Iasos for the expenses of the *stephanephoria*. The city decided to use the money for the benefit of the gymnasium of the *neoi*. An *epimeletes* was to invest the capital in loans and the interest was to be handed to the *dioiketai* of the *neoi*, who were to spend the entire sum on the purchase of oil. See *I. Iasos* 248 (dated under Hadrian) with Forbes 1933: 42–43.

62 *IGR* IV 1572.

this enterprise. It is clear that it was the donor's son who had taken the initiative to use the money bequeathed to the city in order to improve the Gerousia's infrastructure. Admittedly, references to this son's other cash donations to the Gerousia, in addition to those given by his parents, demonstrate that strong bonds between the two parties had already existed. But the use of the bequeathed paternal money, that is, the use of public money, for the benefit of the Gerousia, is something strikingly different. It presupposes that the donor's son considered this particular enterprise as perfectly compatible with the testator's intentions and that the civic authorities ultimately gave their approval, envisaging this course of action as one leading not to an alienation but to a useful utilisation of public property. In this respect, it is highly indicative that a civic *agoranomos* at Magnesia on the Meander was praised, amongst other things, for supplying the Gerousia at his own expense with the oil that the city customarily gave to this body each day.⁶³ Further information on this practice is provided by the well-known decree of the Magnesian Gerousia regulating its internal finances and issued precisely because the daily portion of oil allocated by the city was simply not adequate.⁶⁴

In the second half of the 2nd century A.D. the Council and the People of Termessos in Pisidia voted to inscribe their decrees on *stelai* which were to be erected inside Zeus' sanctuary. This decision included the Gerousia's *syngrammata* as well. Both these civic decrees and the Gerousia's *syngrammata* were considered to have been passed 'for the interest and the salvation of private and public affairs' and to have been tested in time; henceforward they were to be protected as 'sacred'.⁶⁵ It is quite possible that internal problems and unrest of a political and social character (cf. the explicit mention of private affairs in the decree) had preceded and led to the aforementioned decision. But what matters most for

63 *I. Magnesia* 179 ll. 15-19.

64 *I. Magnesia* 116.

65 TAM III 1 3A: περι[τῶν τῆς βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ [δ]ῆ[μου ψη]φισμάτων κ[α]ὶ τῶν ἰ-... τοῦ] συγχεδρίου τῆς γε[ρ]ου[σί]α[ς] συγγραμμάτων ἐπὶ τῷ συμφέροντι καὶ ἐπιτῆ σωτηρίᾳ τῶν τε ἰδιωτικῶν καὶ τῶν δημοσίων/πραγμάτων γεγραμμένων καὶ πείρα δεδοκιμασμένων γνώμην ἐξήνευκεν ἡ βουλή καὶ ὁ σύμπας δῆμος ἀναγραφῆναι αὐτὰ ἐν στήλαις καὶ ταύτας στ-αθ-ῆναι ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τῷ τοῦ Διός, ἵνα καὶ ὡς ἱερὰ φυλάττηται καὶ μηδενὶ ἐξῆ παραβαίνειν αὐτὰ μηδὲ διὰ τοῦτο. Cf. Rhodes-Lewis 1997: 539; Giannakopoulos 2008a: 267-69; Bauer 2014: 241-43.

the purpose of this paper is the undisputable fact that for the civic authorities of Termessos the respect for the Gerosia's decisions constituted an indispensable factor of stability.

After all, whenever we may trace evidence relating to the establishment of such associations, it is absolutely clear that the relevant decision stemmed from the civic authorities. The best-known example is the Gerosia of Sidyma, established by a decree issued by the Council and the People under Commodus.⁶⁶ There is a little detail in the justification clause of this decree which in my view clarifies the way that this initiative was conceptualised by the *polis* of Sidyma:

ἐπεὶ διὰ τοὺς [εὐ]τυχεστάτους καιροὺς τοῦ θειοτάτου Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος [Μάρκου Αὐρηλίου Κομμόδου Ἀντωνεῖνου]] Σεβαστοῦ Εὐσεβοῦς Εὐτυχοῦς καὶ διὰ τὴν τοῦ κρατίστου ἀνθυπάτου Γάιου Πομπωνίου Βά[σ]σου Τερεντιανοῦ περὶ τὰς πόλεις αὐξήσιν καὶ ἡ ἡμετέρα πόλις ἐψηφίσατο σύστημα γεροντικόν.

The use of καὶ here clearly shows that in establishing a Gerosia, the city of Sidyma was adapting itself to a widespread pattern, in an effort to fill what was felt to be a local institutional vacuum.

An equally well-known series of letters sent by Marcus Aurelius and Commodus to the Areios Pagos, the Council and the People of Athens also testifies to long-term deliberations regarding the establishment of a Gerosia, its financial assets and the conditions of membership.⁶⁷ Moreover, inscriptions from Astypalaia, Thessaloniki, Kallatis and Patara attribute the creation of the respective Gerosiai to initiatives taken either by a *demiourgos* (in Astypalaia) or by a *gymnasiarchos* (in Thessaloniki, Kallatis and Patara), that is, to civic magistrates acting in their official capacity.⁶⁸ It is a fair assumption that at this initial stage the civic authorities also decided who was going to be enlisted in these newly founded Gerosiai. Indicatively, the civic decree of Sidyma mentioning the establishment of the local Gerosia was followed by a membership-list. An inscription

66 TAM II 175.

67 See Oliver 1989: 401-13 nos. 193-203.

68 See Peek 1969: 37-38 no. 86 (Astypalaia); IG X 2 1 195-96 (Thessaloniki); IGLScMin III 31 (Kallatis); Engelman 2012: 191-92 nr. 11 (Patara).

from Pompeiopolis refers to a certain Klaudios Asklepiades who was honoured by the city with citizenship and membership of the Gerousia.⁶⁹ It is not clear whether he was an original member of a newly established body or a new member of an already functioning institution; if the second hypothesis is correct, it suggests the possibility that the civic authorities exercised a considerable degree of control over the admission of new *gerontes*, and this, in turn, could again be seen as an indication of the public character of the association in question.⁷⁰

Another relevant hint may be found in the careers of the Gerousia's officials. The leaders of the Gerousia were usually styled *gymnasiarchoi*, a clear allusion to the association's main focus of activity. The greatest part of the relevant testimonies comes from honorific inscriptions which enable us to conclude that these *gymnasiarchoi* were prominent politicians occupying important local magistracies as well. One can hardly escape noticing that for these men the *gymnasiarchia* of the Gerousia was part of a wider *cursus honorum* in local politics.⁷¹ Indicatively, an inscription from Xanthos equates the *gymnasiarchia* of the Gerousia with other civic magistracies (*politikai archai*).⁷² Prominent members of the local political class were more than willing to include the tenure of the Gerousia's internal offices among their purely civic distinctions, and those who erected these honorific inscriptions, be it their relatives or the civic organs, adopted the same attitude as well.

Quite often what characterises these careers is some sort of specialisation: certain *gymnasiarchoi* of the Gerousia are also attested as having held the *gymnasiarchia* of the *neoi* and the *paides*.⁷³ An Ephesian secretary of the Gerousia is also attested as secretary of the *polis*,⁷⁴ while at

69 Marek 1993: 147-48 no. 38

70 Cf. Giannakopoulos 2013: 18-23.

71 See on this topic Giannakopoulos 2008a: 57-98.

72 TAM II 294: ἱερασάμεν[ος πατρῶ]ου θεοῦ Ξάνθου, γυμνασιαρχήσας τῆς σεμνοτάτης γερουσίας, τελέσας δὲ καὶ ἐτέρας πλείονας πολιτικὰς ἀρχάς, τῇ | πατρίδι τὸν ἀνδριάντα κατὰ τὰ ἐψηφισμένα ἐκ τῶν ἰδίῳ ἀνέστησα.

73 *I. Milet* 309 (Iason). *I. Didyma* 258 (Epikrates). *I. Perge* 56 (Demetrios). *I. Magnesia* 164 (Moschion). *IGR IV* 1676 (Gaios Sauphios Maker). *I. Iasos* 250 (Sopatros). *SEG XLVII* (1997) 1573 (Andronikos). *I. Magnesia ad Sipylum* 34 (Dikaphenes).

74 This is Poplios Rutilios Bassos. See *I. Eph.* 1486 l. 16 (secretary of the Gerousia) and *I. Eph.* 1233, 2038 (secretary of the polis).

Kadyanda a *tamias* of the Gerousia also served as *tamias* of the People.⁷⁵ What is even more important is that sometimes the relevant inscriptions demonstrate the simultaneous tenure of magistracies belonging to the Gerousia's and the city's apparatus. This is so in the cases of the *gymnasiarchoi* Dikaphenes and Epikrates and the secretaries Markos Aurelios Soterichos and Markos Aurelios Onesimos.⁷⁶ All this raises the possibility that at least occasionally appointments to the Gerousia's internal offices did not depend on an exclusively internal decision but were subject to a certain degree of collaboration and coordination with the civic authorities.⁷⁷

It should be finally noted that the imperial power followed a consistent policy of support towards the Gerousia in various Greek cities. Exchanges of embassies and letters and awards of privileges and fiscal immunities are attested for the Gerousiai of Ephesus, Athens, Apameia, Sardeis, Tralleis and Chios.⁷⁸ The imperial appreciation of the institution of the Gerousia as such is perfectly illustrated by the short but fully comprehensive and significant answer given by the proconsul to the request

75 TAM II 661.

76 See TAM V 2 1367 (Dikaphenes), *I. Didyma* 258 (Epikrates at Miletos), *I. Tralleis* 66 (Markos Aurelios Soterichos at Tralleis), 67 (Markos Aurelios Onesimos).

77 Based on the fact that the *gymnasiarchoi* of the *neoi* frequently acted as *gymnasiarchoi* of the *epheboi* as well, Forbes 1933: 22-23 argued that the former were elected by the *polis*. Admittedly, it is not uncommon to encounter individuals recorded as *gymnasiarchoi* of various age-groups (*paides*, *epheboi*, *neoi*, *gerontes*/*Gerousia*), but there is always the problem of determining whether these *gymnasiarchiai* were held successively or simultaneously (cf. Poland 1909: 40 and Forbes 1933: 31). In the latter case an involvement on the part of the *polis* is quite certain. But there is absolutely no evidence to demonstrate that Forbes' view that all the administrative officials of the *neoi* were appointed by the *polis* (Forbes 1933: 30-36) necessarily applies to the Gerousia as well (or to the *neoi* themselves as a matter of fact). In any case, the frequent appearance of the *gymnasiarchia* of the *neoi* in inscriptions recording municipal careers indicates the public status of this gymnasial association as well (see below, Section III).

78 Ephesus: SEG XLIII (1993) 757-72; *I. Eph.* 1486 (Oliver 1989: 170-73 no. 71); *I. Eph.* 25 (Oliver 1989: 346-51 no. 11). Athens: Oliver 1989: 401-13, nos. 193-203. Apameia: Oliver 1941: 163-64 nr. 52. Sardeis: *I. Sardis* 8 V-VI. Tralleis: *I. Tralleis* 41. Chios: Zolotas 1908: 234 no. 45.

of the Sydimeans to ratify their decree enacting the foundation of a Gerousia: τὰ καλῶς γεγόμενα ἐπαινῆσθαι μᾶλλον προσήκει ἢ κυροῦσθαι.⁷⁹ It is clear that the Romans saw in the Gerousia an institution worth encouragement and promotion, as it embodied at the local level values which were central to the ideology of the Augustan regime as well: conservatism, respect for (and revival of) tradition, paternalism.⁸⁰ The various Gerousiai on their part displayed a great zeal for erecting imperial monuments (sometimes of a clear cultic character) and for organising cultic events for the emperors,⁸¹ in a conscious effort⁸² to function as a vehicle for diffusing imperial ideology and for expressing the community's imperial loyalty. It is by no means accidental that a Roman provincial governor, Pliny the Younger, communicating with the emperor Trajan about the destruction that a fire caused in Nikomedeia, included the building of the Gerousia among the destroyed *publica opera*.⁸³ His view of the Gerousia perfectly corresponds with contemporary conceptions of this institution at the local level, as expressed in the epigraphic record.

II. The Gerousia's function as a private association

Although I have so far dwelt on the Gerousia's features that demonstrate its public dimension, we should also constantly bear in mind that in many other ways the Gerousia did not differ from private associations. It had its own assemblies and its own officials (*gymnasiarchoi*, *Gerousiarchai*,

79 TAM II 175 ll. 11-12.

80 See in this respect Giannakopoulos 2008a: 496-501; Spawforth 2012: 172-74.

81 For the relevant evidence see Giannakopoulos 2008a: 407-71.

82 Under Marcus Aurelius, the Ephesian Gerousia possessed images of all the past emperors in its own building (*I. Eph.* 25).

83 Plin. *Ep.* 10.33: *Cum diversam partem provinciae circumirem, Nicomediae vastissimum incendium multas privatorum domos et duo publica opera, quamquam via interiacente, Gerusian et Iseon absumpsit*. This point had already been noted by Menadier 1880: 52; cf. Bailey 2006: 9. Commenting on this letter, Sherwin-White 1966: 606-7 characterised the Gerousiai as 'civic centres for the elder men of substance'. It is noteworthy that Pliny explicitly distinguishes between the private residences and the two *publica opera*, the *Gerusia* and the *Iseon* destroyed by the fire.

archontes, *grammateis*, *tamiai* and *ekdikoi* are some of the titles used to denote them).⁸⁴ It had its own common treasury – we hear of *symbolai* paid to the Gerousia –⁸⁵ and its own financial assets which comprised agricultural land and urban real property as well, sometimes even a gymnasium and baths of its own. Although there is usually no information on how the Gerousia came to own agricultural land, a fair assumption would be that this was the result of donations to the body. Indeed an inscription from Perge explicitly refers to vineyards donated to the *geraioi* by a certain Markos Pheridios.⁸⁶ Needless to say, such gifts were frequently awarded to private associations as well.⁸⁷ Admittedly, individual Gerousiai such as those of Magnesia and Ephesus appear as great land-owners or great lenders on a scale not attested in private associations; but the difference is exactly that: one regarding the scale of financial assets not their nature.⁸⁸

Another point of convergence between the Gerousiai and private associations concerns their involvement in the various strategies relating to the protection of the memory of the dead. Various Gerousiai appear in our sources as recipients of endowments destined to finance posthumous commemorative rites;⁸⁹ sometimes these are the *rosalia*.⁹⁰ The Gerousia of Hierapolis received *stephanotika* for the crowning of graves. In Hierapolis, Ephesos, Smyrna and Kos the local Gerousiai are called upon to look after tombs, the formula used being *κῆδεταί τοῦ μνημείου*. Finally, funerary inscriptions frequently record various Gerousiai as recipients of fines in the event of a violation of the tomb.⁹¹ Once again, the same functions were performed by private associations as well.⁹²

84 For the internal organisation of the Gerousia see Van Rossum 1988: 189-200; Giannakopoulos 2008a: 57-98.

85 Cf. Giannakopoulos 2013: 16-18.

86 *I. Perge* 66.

87 Cf. Arnaoutoglou 1998: 74.

88 On the Gerousia's financial assets and activities see Van Rossum 1988: 201-16; Giannakopoulos 2008a: 98-129.

89 See Giannakopoulos 2008a: 293-312, 362-68.

90 *I. Iznik* 95.

91 See Giannakopoulos 2008a: 314-32.

92 Van Nijf 1997: 31-68; Harland 2013: 68.

III. Comparison between the Gerousia and private associations

The argument presented in the first section regarding the public dimension of the Gerousiai rests mainly on the following points:

- a) the appearance of the Gerousiai next to the Council and the People as equal co-grantors of civic honours;
- b) the inclusion of the Gerousiai in euergetical schemes addressed to the civic community;
- c) the inclusion of the Gerousiai in distributions which might have been privately initiated but were nonetheless addressed to some or all the constituent parts of the civic community (Council, civic tribes, citizens);
- d) the Gerousiai's participation in distributions, banquets and festivals which were organised in an official, sometimes religious, context by state officials and dramatised the institutional civic landscape as they involved categories of participants defined by purely political criteria (Council, citizens, civic magistrates);
- e) The use of the Gerousia as a symbol of civic identity in various ways and contexts (coins, statues, honorific titles expressing a combined filial relation with the *polis* and the Gerousia as well);
- f) The financial aid given to the Gerousiai by the *polis*;
- g) The foundation of Gerousiai by decisions and initiatives taken by the *polis* and its magistrates;
- h) The conceptualisation of the Gerousia's internal offices as part of the civic *cursus honorum* in honorific inscriptions;
- i) The imperial support and recognition which expressed the notion that the Gerousia was part of the local public institutions.

The Gerousiai of approximately four dozen cities had at least one or several of the features described in the aforementioned points. Local variations probably played an important role. For example, the Ephesian Gerousia is known to have been continuously and considerably supported by the Roman emperors, but did not join the Council and the People in the award of honours, which is one of the most frequent and significant

public features of this institution. The Gerousiai of the Bithynian cities as a rule did not meet the aforementioned criteria. Finally, it seems that the Gerousiai of the old Greek cities of coastal Asia Minor and the adjacent islands were not as active in the joint award of honours as those of the more recent *poleis* of the hinterland (inner Caria, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Pisidia, Lycia).⁹³

We may now proceed to draw a comparison between the public role of the Gerousiai and that of religious and professional associations, which we commonly characterise as private.

Point a: As is well known, publicly visible honours were also awarded by private associations. The honorific inscriptions and monuments set up by them reflected their attempt to claim a distinct position in the civic sphere, presenting themselves as caring ‘about the city’s wider interests, and not merely about their narrow ones’.⁹⁴ Moreover, insofar as the erection of these monuments presupposed the approval of civic authorities, it becomes clear that the latter were willing to enter into formal relations and interaction with private associations, allowing them to inscribe their

93 It is important to note that in mainland Greece organised bodies of elders appeared that were officially affiliated to specific deities or heroes of their hosting cities. I characterise this affiliation as official because it forms part of the collective’s identity, as expressed in its name, something that is completely absent from the Gerousiai under examination here which are always defined, especially in their correspondence with the imperial authorities, with the civic ethnic. The ‘Sacred Gerousia of Asklepios’ at Hyettos was a private religious association (*IG VII 2808*; see Oliver 1941: 29–30; Roesch 1982: 159; Van Rossum 1988: 66–68; cf *CAPInv 984* (F. Marchand). In the Peloponnese we encounter groups called ‘the Argive gerontes descended from Danaos and Hypermestra’ in Argos and ‘the sacred gerontes of Upesia descended from Kresphontes’ in Messene. A body defined as ‘Upesia’ (an alternative name for Artemis) is also on record in Thuria. These were also cultic associations closely related to constitutive elements of their hosting cities’ political and religious identity and involved in the attribution of honours, usually on their own and not in conjunction with the Council and the People. However, an honorific inscription from Korone dated to the 3rd century A.D. was erected according to a decree of the polis and the *hiera Gerousia*. See on these bodies, Makres 2011 and Spawforth 2012: 169–79 who comment on the relevant testimonies and on the similarities between these public bodies and the other Gerousiai under examination here.

94 Van Nijf 1997: 121 commenting on the honours awarded by private associations.

name and presence in the civic landscape.⁹⁵ This process was in itself a mark of some kind of public significance attributed to private associations. Admittedly, when the Gerousia was conferring honours alone, it was acting and being treated in a way similar to that of professional or religious associations.⁹⁶ However, the very fact that Gerousiai frequently co-operated with the Council and the People in the award of joint honours represented a significantly fuller integration in the civic institutional framework than that any private association might have achieved. The latter might also appear in honorific inscriptions together with the Council and the People, but they did so mainly as executive agents of decisions taken by the aforementioned civic organs. Their name was not normally placed next to that of the Council and the People as grantors of honour. On the contrary, their involvement consisted in financing and realising the erection of the honorific monument voted by the Council and the People, as was the case with the *bapheis* at Thyateira,⁹⁷ the *technitai* at the Skytike Plateia at Apamea,⁹⁸ the *epi to geuma pragmateuomenoi*

95 Van Nijf 1997: 121-26. Gabrielsen 2007: 196. Three texts illustrate the relevant processes. The first is a decree issued by the *demos* of Termessos in Pisidia which allowed a body of *technitai* to set up a statue of Atalante (honoured separately by the *demos* as well) and to engrave on its base whatever inscription they chose (*TAM* III 1 4, dated to the 2nd century AD). The second is an honorary decree issued by a *koinon* of priestesses at Mantinea which prescribes the erection of a stele in the *Koragion* in accordance with a decision taken by the *archontes* and the *synedroi* (*IG* V 2 265 dated to 46-43 BC). The third is the well-known decree of Kyzikos for Antonia Tryphaina which records both a petition addressed by a group of foreign merchants and the subsequent permission given to them to set up an image of Antonia Tryphaina in the temple of Athena Polias (*IGR* IV 144 with *SEG* IV 2 (1930) 707).

96 According to a fragmentary decree dated to the second half of the 2nd century BC from Magnesia on the Meander, the local Gerousia first decided to honour a certain Euboulides with an image and subsequently approached the Council and the People seeking permission to erect the image in question at the palaestra. See *I. Magnesia* 102 with Wilhelm 1906: 69-71 and Derenne 1933: 72-73.

97 *TAM* V 2 989. Another similar collaboration is attested in *TAM* V 2 1098: an association of *Iouliastai* constructed the monument consecrated by the People to Gaios Ioulios Xenon. See Hughes 1999: 172.

98 *IGR* IV 790. In *IGR* IV 791, also from Apameia, the statue voted by the Council, the People and the Roman settlers is erected by the *epi tes Thermaias plateias ergastai* in accordance with a decree of the *polis*.

at Ephesos,⁹⁹ and the *pragmateuomenoi* from Alexandria at Perinthos.¹⁰⁰ Hence, if it is possible to see in these acts an indication that the private associations in question were accepted as ‘quasi-official institutions’,¹⁰¹ it has to be stressed that their treatment was not equal with that reserved for the Gerousiai, frequently appearing side by side with the civic bodies, in the nominative case, as a full partner in the award of honours.

Sometimes the verbal formulas used in honorific inscriptions denote that a private association functioned as an honouring body in accordance with decisions taken by the Council and the People.¹⁰² But such formulas simply demonstrate that the honours awarded by the associations (for example, the erection of a statue in a public place) were – and needed to be – approved by the Council and the People.¹⁰³ The initiator and the grantor of the honour remained the association alone, not the association in conjunction with the Council and the People, as was the case with the Gerousia.

Only very rarely do we find in honorific inscriptions verbal formulas placing the name of cultic or professional associations next to that of the Council or the People in the nominative case, as co-grantors of honour on an equal basis.¹⁰⁴ The *synodos ton tes theou myston* at Smyrna honoured two female *theologoi* along with the Council and the People,¹⁰⁵ but this particular group, perhaps identical to the *synodos ton myston tes megales theas pro poleos thesmophorou Demetras*, known by another honorific inscription as a sole grantor of honour,¹⁰⁶ was devoted to a prominent local deity and thus seems to have cultivated strong bonds with the civic or-

99 *I. Eph.* 728.

100 *I. Perinthos* 27-28.

101 See Eckhardt 2016: 153-54.

102 See for example *I. Kibyra* 34: *κατὰ τὰ δόξαντα τῇ βουλῇ|καὶ τῷ δήμῳ τῆς λαμπρο|τάτης Καισαρέων Κιβυρα|τῶν πόλεως ἡ σεμνοτάτη|συνεργασία τῶν σκυτοβυρσέ|ων Τιβέριον Κλαύδιον|Πολέμωνα, ἀσιάρχην, ἰπ|πικόν...* Other examples include TAM V 3 1491 (*skyteis* at Philadelphia), *I. Smyrna* 715 (*synergasia kyrtobolon* at Smyrna), IG IV 365 (*thereutores* at Corinth honouring a physician *psephismati boules*).

103 See above n. 95. Cf. Ustinova 2005: 187 commenting on IG XII 2 1033.

104 The evidence is assembled and summarised in Suis 2005: 206-7.

105 *I. Smyrna* 653.

106 *I. Smyrna* 655.

gans. The manifestly political overtones of the cultic association of Pompeiastai at Delos, who honoured their patron Pompey along with the Athenian People, may also explain this co-operation.¹⁰⁷ In both cases the crucial factor was the public significance attributed to the divine figures venerated by the associations in question, and consequently, to the specific associations as well.¹⁰⁸ Finally, oecumenical athletic and artistic associations – and perhaps their branches as well – that were highly esteemed and officially recognised by the Roman State also appeared in this capacity, in cities like Tralleis,¹⁰⁹ Hierapolis¹¹⁰ and Erythrai.¹¹¹

The case of various associations of Roman settlers in Greek cities needs also to be briefly considered in this framework. From the 1st century BC onwards such corporate bodies often appear side by side with civic organs as grantors of honours.¹¹² The political importance of these formally organised groups of Roman citizens in a world governed by Rome may easily explain the willingness of the civic organs to collaborate with them on an equal basis in the award of honours. In this respect, a comparison with the aforementioned case of the Alexandrian traders

107 *I. Delos* 1641 (CAPIInv 893, A. Cazemier). Le Queré 2015: 37 and 43 associates the Delian Pompeiastai with Pompey's victory against the pirates and the relevant Pompeian propaganda.

108 Cf. on these associations the remarks made by Suys 2005: 206–14. On the collaboration between private associations and civic bodies in the award of honours see also Harland 2013: 86–87, who, however, does not always distinguish between the joint award of honours and the execution of a decision to award honours. Some of the inscriptions he cites (*I. Lindos* 391–92) do not record a joint award of honours, or any kind of collaboration, but simply record the names of the various bodies that had independently honoured a distinguished person on various occasions. This is a not uncommon practice in both honorific and funerary monuments. See *IG II²* 4013 (Athens); *IGBulg V* 5464 (Philippoupolis); Segre – Pugliese Carratelli 1949–1951, no. 78 (Kamiros); *IG XII 3* 104 (Nisyros); *I. Hierapolis* 32 (Hierapolis); *I. Smyrna* 534 (Smyrna); *LBW* 1743n (Troas).

109 *I. Tralleis* 65. Cf. CAPIInv 1729 (M. Carbon). See also *I. Tralleis* 112, 133.

110 *SEG XXXV* (1985), 1380–81. Cf. CAPIInv 138 (B. Eckhardt).

111 *I. Erythrai* 60. Cf. Harland 2013: 87. On associations of athletes see Forbes 1955; Pleket 1973; Caldelli 1992. For the Dionysiac artists see Le Guen 2001; Aneziri 2003. For the Imperial Period cf. Aneziri 2008; Aneziri 2014.

112 Zoumbaki 2017: 254–62 assembles the relevant evidence from Greece. See also Zoumbaki's contribution in this volume. On associations of Romans in Phrygia see now Eckhardt 2016: 149–50.

active at Perinthos may be useful. The latter also constituted an organised group of foreigners although, as opposed to the Romans, it was not so important as to be accepted by the local civic bodies as equal partners.

Points b-d: A comparison between the position held by the Gerousia and the role of private associations in distributions and banquets leads to similar conclusions. As mentioned above, the Gerousia appeared in distributions addressed to corporate civic bodies such as the Council, but also in distributions to non-corporate categories defined by political and legal criteria, such as the citizens, the *sitometroumenoi*, and even the *paroi-koi* or the *metoikoi* and the freedmen. On the other hand, private associations seldom did so. Most of the distributions and the banquets which involved them did not include categories of participants defined by political/legal criteria; hence these events, even if organised by influential local statesmen and benefactors, normally did not sanction the presence of private associations next to that of civic institutions, as was the case with the Gerousia.

A notable exception is the distributions offered by Aurelios Hermippos at Philadelphia: the beneficiaries were the Council, the Gerousia and the seven tribes of the city, some if not all of them named after professions.¹¹³ As Van Nijf has noted, the inclusion of the term *phyle* in the official name of these professional associations shows how the latter strove – and presumably succeeded – to gain political recognition.¹¹⁴ It is by no means accidental that it was such professional groups, invested with the name of a traditional civic institution, that were deemed worthy of taking their own share in a scheme also addressed to the Council and the Gerousia.

Another exception is the distributions organised by Aba in Histria.¹¹⁵ But even in this case the professional association of *tektones*, the *Hieroplateitai*, presumably a neighbourhood association, and the *Herakleistai*, a religious association, received a distribution of wine, as opposed to the

113 IGR IV 1632. See also TAM V 3 1490.

114 Van Nijf 1997: 184; cf. Gabrielsen 2007: 197; Harland 2013: 84-85. Eckhardt 2016: 156 n. 167 sees in the use of this term an attempt ‘to incorporate professional groups into a Romanized civic order’.

115 I. Histria 57.

Council and the Gerousia, which received donations in cash. Admittedly, occupational associations like those of the physicians and the teachers, along with the *Taureastai*, a private religious association devoted to the cult of the important local deity Poseidon-Taureas, were treated just like the Council and the Gerousia.¹¹⁶ Another city on the western coast of the Pontus, Dionysopolis, also furnishes examples of distributions including both the councillors and occupational associations of teachers, physicians and *agoraioi*.¹¹⁷

It is equally interesting to focus on the well-known involvement of certain religious associations in festivals belonging to the official civic cult, as V. Suys and Ph. Harland have recently done.¹¹⁸ The *Poseidionastai* from Berytos participated in the Delian Apollonia by offering an ox to the procession;¹¹⁹ a *thiasos* of Herakles in early-4th-century B.C. Athens was headed by the official priest and therefore probably participated in the official cult.¹²⁰ The *orgeones* of Bendis at Piraeus, Dionysiac *thiasoi* at Magnesia on the Meander and Miletus, associations of athletes, performers and *hymnodoi* also did so.¹²¹

Points e-i: To the best of my knowledge, private associations did not function as symbols of civic identity in coins, statues etc. No honorific title indicating the filial relation of the honorand to both the *polis* and

116 On Aba's distributions and the status of the various beneficiaries see the detailed analysis offered by Van Nijf 1997: 160-85.

117 See *IGBulg I*² 15bis (organised by a priest of Dionysos and *gymnasiarchos*) and *IGBulg I*² 15ter. Cf. Van Nijf 1997: 170-71. For distributions in Ephesus including the Council, the Gerousia, and groups of sacred victors and worshippers of Artemis see *CAPinv* 1625 (B. Eckhardt).

118 Suys 2005: 209-11; Harland 2013: 103-6.

119 *I. Delos* 1520; cf. Van Nijf 1997: 198.

120 *IG II*² 2343, 2345.

121 For the *thiasoi* see *I. Magnesia* 215a and *Milet VI* 3 1222. Cf. Jaccottet 2005. On the participation of *hymnodoi* and other religious groups such as *chrysophoroi* and *kouretes* in festivals see Van Nijf 1997: 165-68; Harland 2013: 103-6. Cf. Price 1984: 61-62, 70-71, 88-90, 118, 129, 191, 209. For a detailed study of associations of *chrysophoroi* in Asia Minor see Kuhn 2014: 74-81 (with particular emphasis on their participation in processions and distributions). For the *orgeones* of Bendis see below n. 124.

one or several such associations existed. Furthermore, honorific inscriptions for members of the local political class normally did not mention private associations' offices as part of a civic *cursus honorum*. In the Hellenistic Period the aforementioned *thiasoi* of Maenads at Magnesia on the Meander were established by the *polis*, as was presumably the *demosios thiasos* active in Miletus.¹²² But whether these *thiasoi* may be characterised as private is not at all certain.¹²³ A substantial degree of official recognition was attributed to, or at least claimed by, the *orgeones* of Bendis in Athens as well.¹²⁴ During the Imperial Period, the *hymnodoi*, established with imperial encouragement if not initiative,¹²⁵ corresponded with the emperor.¹²⁶ So did the associations of athletes and performers.¹²⁷ The recently published letter of Hadrian to the civic authorities of Miletus shows the *polis* and the emperor entering into negotiations about the constitution of a professional association of *naukleroi*: the foundation and the function of this association were a matter of civic concern, if not initiative, and of imperial interest as well.¹²⁸ This may be explained by reference to the vital role played by the *naukleroi* in the normal provision of supplies to the cities of the Empire.¹²⁹ But there is no other relevant testimony as far as I know. In my view, the typical way of establishing an

122 According to Suys (2005: 207-9) a considerable degree of public recognition may also be discerned in other religious associations which incorporate the civic ethnic in their name such as *the mystai kai embastai tes Kores en Smyrnei* (*I. Smyrna* 726), the *synodos of Dionysos Breiseus en Smyrnei* (*I. Smyrna* 600; but in both cases it is the toponym not the civic ethnic that defines the association), and the *Trallianon hoi mystai* (*I. Tralleis* 74), and in associations called *pro poleos* such as the *Demetriastai* at Ephesus (*I. Eph.* 1595, 4337).

123 Suys 2005: 209 considers them as public associations.

124 Gabrielsen 2007: 192, 203 with n. 52-54.

125 Price 1984: 118.

126 *I. Eph.* 3801. On the petition addressed to the Roman proconsul by an Ephesian association of initiates performing mysteries to Demeter and the emperors see *I. Eph.* 213 with Harland 2013: 96-98

127 Oliver 1989: nos. 24, 29, 37, 86, 96, 128, 212, 225.

128 Ehrhardt & Günther 2013.

129 Cf. Eckhardt 2016: 157 on private associations with 'high relevance to the city'.

association is best described in the well-known charter of the *eranos philias* from Paiania, which records an initiative taken by several individuals outside any civic framework and with no public intervention at all.¹³⁰

At various points in this paper it has been noted that it was the various associations of *neoi*, or other organised bodies centred on the public institution of the gymnasium, which were closer to the Gerousia in terms of integration into the local public life. Indeed, the *neoi* sometimes worked together with the Council and the People in the erection of common honorific monuments (point a).¹³¹ They participated in civic processions (point d).¹³² Under Elagabalus Laodicea in Phrygia issued coins bearing the inscription *συνεδρίου νέων* (point e).¹³³ The offices of the *neoi*'s administrative apparatus also appear in honorific inscriptions as part of the local *cursus honorum* (point h).¹³⁴ Communication with the emperors and recognition by the representatives of the Roman Imperial power are attested for the *neoi* of Pergamum and Kyzikos (point i), while financial and legal aid by the *polis* is recorded for the *neoi* of Iasos (point f).¹³⁵ But the *neoi* can hardly be regarded as a private association;¹³⁶ more importantly, the evidence regarding their integration into the local public sphere is, in absolute numbers, nowhere near as great as that concerning the Gerousia.

130 *IG II²* 1369. Cf. Arnaoutoglou 1998: 70-71; *ibid.* 2003: 129.

131 For the *neoi* as co-grantors of honours with the Council and/or the People see *SEG XXIX* (1979), 527 (Larisa); *EKM I*, 113-14 (Beroia); *I. Sestos* 1 (Sestos); *I. Iasos* 90 (Iasos); *CIG* 2944, Ramsay 1883: 272-74 no. 15 and Kontoleon 1886: 520 no. 17 (Nysa); *I. Tralleis* 77, 93, 112 (Tralleis); *I. Aph2007* 7.8, 8.84, 12.105, 12.202, 12.215 (restored), 15.262 (Aphrodisias). Cf. Forbes 1933: 43. For the institutional interaction between the *neoi* and the civic authorities in the award of honours see also Van Bremen 2013: 47-54.

132 Forbes 1933: 26, 52-53.

133 *RPC VI* 5497 (temporary). See also Forbes 1933: 17.

134 Cf. Forbes 1933: 22-23, 30-36. See also above n. 77.

135 Forbes 1933: 38-43.

136 On the public character of the *neoi* see Forbes 1933: 42-44. Van Bremen 2013: 52-53 characterises them as a civic sub-group.

Final remarks

It has recently been pointed out that the purpose of forming an association, its *raison d'être*, eludes us and that it is methodologically unwise to draw relevant conclusions from the functions that an association performed.¹³⁷ In many ways, this remark applies to the Gerousiai as well. No ancient document gives any account of the reasons for establishing a Gerousia. The closest we can get is the need to fill a vacuum in the civic institutional landscape, as the decree of Sidyma implies. Studying the associations of *presbyteroi*, Fröhlich has related their emergence to the development and opening of the gymnasium to men over thirty, with the general proliferation of gymnasial (such as the *neoi*) and private associations and with the need of individuals of mature age still wishing to frequent the gymnasium to find the necessary means to finance their activities.¹³⁸ Similar factors may account for the creation of the Gerousiai as well, the facilitation and encouragement of an ongoing and perpetual use of gymnasial amenities by influential and respectable men of mature age being the main purpose of such associations. After all, the gymnasium was at the very core of the Gerousia's activities. However, the historical significance of any association does not lie only – or even primarily – in its purpose, however well-defined this might have been (and there is no evidence suggesting that the Gerousiai had such a well-defined purpose). It is in terms of the association's functions and interaction with other political and social agents that we may more effectively perceive its position in contemporary society.

So were the Gerousiai under examination public or private bodies? To a large extent this is a matter of perspective. If we examine the Gerousiai from the viewpoint of a student of state institutions administering state affairs, they do not belong to them. But if we consider them from the viewpoint of a student of private religious and professional associations, they do not fit in either (indicatively, Van Nijf defined the Gerousia as a semi-public institution).¹³⁹ Their characterisation as social associations may appear to be a way of solving this problem, but in reality this is a

137 Arnaoutoglou 2014: 259.

138 Fröhlich 2013: 98.

139 Van Nijf 1997: 74.

way of avoiding it and bypassing it: this approach runs the risk of treating the Gerousia as nothing more than a convivial gathering of individuals with greater prestige than others and of strongly downplaying its public dimension, which constitutes one of its most dominant aspects as an institutional entity.

But we need to clarify what this public dimension was all about, and for that purpose a different perspective is needed. Taking into account the Gerousia's features summarised above in Section III, I would argue that the crucial point in assessing the public dimension of the Gerousia and in comparing it with that of the various private associations active in the Greek cities is neither its governmental competence nor its presence in the public sphere alone: it is the nature and the character of its involvement in the public sphere that matters. The basic criterion is the specific way in which the sources of state authority allowed each individual association access to acts, events and symbols that expressed the sovereign power of the civic community and/or its political identity. Equally important is the extent to which the sources of state authority were involved in the foundation and the internal function of an individual association. Finally, one should also take into account the particular way in which the place of the association was conceptualised in the contemporary public discourse, as recorded in documents emanating from the agents of political power. In all these respects the Gerousia emerges as an institution that was very closely affiliated and attached to the various formal organs of the *polis*.¹⁴⁰ Lacking any serious governmental competence, it still had its own share in the politics of civic honours which, as has already been noted, was a fundamental function of the civic community in the Imperial Period (see above Section III point a). Founded by the *polis*, unlike nearly all the private associations that we know, it enjoyed civic support and recognition, at a material, symbolic and also conceptual level, being treated in the same capacity as purely political categories belonging to the state apparatus and organisation (see above Section III points b-h). It is in this sense that we may speak of the Gerousia's public dimension, which was further enhanced and consolidated by a

140 Lack of formal affiliation to the *polis* may be seen as a fundamental attribute of private associations. See Gabrielsen 2007: 186.

mutually beneficial relationship cultivated with the Imperial power (see above Section III point i).

On the other hand, the best that most private associations could ever achieve in terms of access to events, acts and symbols that expressed the sovereign power of the civic community and/or its political identity was to gain the permission to erect honorific monuments and inscriptions of their own or to acquire distinct seats in the theatre.¹⁴¹ There were of course important exceptions. Certain associations could occupy a distinct position in events that dramatised the civic identity, as a constituent part of the *polis* next to traditional civic organs such as the Council; they could participate in religious ceremonies organised by the state authorities; they could even appear as equal co-grantors of honour along with the civic organs. But their participation in this last act, which formally expressed the sovereign will of the civic community, was extremely rare. Moreover, I would argue that the associations involved in the aforementioned areas of civic life were hardly the typical private associations of the Greek world (this is surely the case with the groups of Roman settlers abroad).¹⁴² However, they did share with the Gerousia an important common feature: an associative identity which was held to be fundamental by and for the civic community. The Gerousia's public dimension ultimately rested on the combination of the *presbeion* with the continuous commitment to the cultural values of the gymnasium as a way of life. Likewise, associations either devoted to important deities or related to the proper functioning of civic life (associations of teachers, physicians, athletes, *naukleroi*) could also under certain circumstances claim and be attributed a public dimension, in the sense described above.¹⁴³

With respect to the taxonomy of the various corporate bodies of the Greek *polis*, we may thus establish a kind of scale, susceptible of changes and dynamic developments. We could then place most of the religious,

141 Van Nijf 1997: 209-40.

142 It is hardly accidental that Van Nijf, studying private professional associations, defined groups such as the *hymnodoi*, the *kouretes* and the *chrysophoroi* as public religious associations (Van Nijf 1997: 168). Kuhn 2014: 74-81 highlights the position of the *chrysophoroi* next to the Council and the Gerousia in acts of euergetism.

143 On such associations cf. Eckhardt 2016: 156-57.

cultic, neighbourhood or kinship associations enjoying minimum or comparatively little access to the public sphere (mainly indicated by the authorisation to erect honorific monuments either on their own or as executive agents of the civic authorities) at the lower end of the scale, the less typical religious or even occupational associations discussed above, the *neoi* and the Gerousia higher up the scale, together with purely state/civic institutions, such as the various civic subdivisions, and ultimately the People and the Council at the top.¹⁴⁴ We could also describe a similar taxonomy by using the metaphor of a continuum. But the ambiguous nature of the Gerousia (a non-governmental corporate body with a strong public dimension and an internal organisation similar to that of private associations) may also invite us to focus on the particular way in which the institutional/associational landscape of the Greek city was conceptualised by its inhabitants, mainly with respect to the various collective and individual needs and services covered and provided by these institutions/associations. Two examples seem to me especially indicative. The Greek city of the Imperial Period needed to display its loyalty towards its gods and emperors and to award honours so as to ensure the ongoing operation of euergetism; we can see that policy-making bodies such as the Council and the People, public bodies such as the Gerousia and various private associations were all active in this area, usually in separate contexts and events, but sometimes in the same ones, formally interacting with each other. The inhabitants of the Greek city searched for ways to perpetuate and protect their posthumous memory and we may easily observe them turning not only to the Gerousia and to private associations but also to the Council for that purpose. It is in these areas, perhaps in others as well, that the boundary between the state, public and private spheres tends in practice to fade away, although it still remains strong and of vital importance in many fundamentally significant ways. Such approaches, ones taking into account what the inhabitants of the Greek city expected from the various corporate bodies that formed part of the civic universe they lived in, may allow us to see all these in-

144 I would agree with B. Eckhardt (2016: 155) that private associations approached the status of official institutions 'as closely as they could'. But not as closely as the Gerousiai did. This is the point stressed here.

stitutions as parts of a pluralistic society encompassing multiple formally organised subgroups, which constituted a strongly hierarchical, heterogeneous, but nonetheless internally coherent and meaningful whole.

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